8368 with footnotes

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Princes, subjects and Gandhi
Alternatives to citizenship at the end of empire[1]

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This essay harks back to the period when Bal Ram Nanda, an outstanding student at Lahore University and subsequently a government servant in the Railways, began to write history. Nanda's first and least known work, published under a pseudonym, was on the partition of India. This was not a book about great men, Nanda's subsequent preoccupation, but of 'ordinary people' uprooted; and like him, I write of their actions during the upheavals of 1947. Gandhi is part of my story, but he is not the main focus, for the compelling reason that I am not a scholar of Gandhi. Yet Gandhi's words and actions at this crucial juncture reveal unexplored dimensions of the Mahatma's moral politics that call, I suggest, for deeper and more sustained investigation.

The mass migrations after partition immediately conjure up images of refugee caravans crossing the Radcliffe Line between India and Pakistan. We assume that the frightened people who fled their homes faced a clear and binary choice between two

[1] I thank the trustees of the B. R. Nanda Trust for the privilege of being able to acknowledge the debt of gratitude that every historian of modern India owes to B. R. Nanda, and to pay tribute to his role as founder-director of one of India's great institutions, the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library. Founded in 1964, just over half a century ago, today Teenmurti is a mecca for every historian of modern India the world over. It holds the world's most impressive archive – at the time of writing almost one million pages of manuscripts - on modern India, an unrivalled newspaper collection and photographic records. Its library, now being digitised, will soon contain and preserve a priceless heritage of more than nine million documents. As its first director, Nanda laid the foundations on which the Museum and Library were built. The values that prompted Nanda to take up his pen after Gandhi's assassination in 1948 are under siege once again today. So also, it seems, is the independence of Teenmurti, and indeed of the historical profession itself. Perhaps there has never been a more appropriate moment to laud B. R. Nanda's contribution and legacy, and to recall the ideals of tolerance that were close to his heart.

republics – India and Pakistan - and between two alternative 'modern', post-colonial, sovereignties. This is the official narrative of the new nations, and no historian (including myself) who has studied refugees has challenged it.

However the story was not only far more complex, it was far more intriguing than that narrative. In 1947, thousands of people made other choices, choices that did not involve flight to 'the other dominion', choices that revealed a deep lack of trust in *both* the new republics. They escaped to princely states, seeking the protection of rajas, raosahebs, jamsahebs, nizams, and nawabs. Just when the Constituent Assemblies of India and Pakistan were debating the terms of national citizenship, their would-be citizens fled in search of subjecthood.

This essay attempts to piece together this little-known history, from fragmentary and scattered sources. It first discusses the patterns of migration, to give a sense of their scope and scale. Next, it teases out some of the hopes and expectations that animated the migrants, and princes' responses to them. Finally, it touches briefly upon Gandhi's engagement with these migrants and the princes whose shelter they sought. The very fact that many people of the subcontinent sought alternatives to republican citizenship, I argue, demands our attention. As things turned out, these aspirations for post-imperial subjecthood failed. Nonetheless they are deeply significant in ways I hope to elucidate in my concluding remarks.

I

In 1947 undivided India contained 562 princely states, which varied enormously in size. The largest, Hyderabad, was about half the size of France and boasted 17 million subjects in the mid 20th century;[2] the smallest was less than one square mile with a population of hardly 200.[3] Together these principalities covered roughly a third of

[2] Government of India, *White Paper on Hyderabad*, Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1948, p. 2.

[3] Barbara Ramusack, *The Indian Princes and their States. The New Cambridge History of India III.6*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 3.

India's territory, and accounted for one in four of its people. (**Press: IMAGE 1, MAP of undivided India in 1947 showing princely states, somewhere here**)

In broad terms, migrations to subjecthood', as they might be described, were of four 'types':

The first was the flight from territories of former British India (now places in either India or Pakistan), to princely states. Prominent peninsular states acted as powerful magnets to panic-stricken Muslims from across India. Hyderabad and Bhopal were significant examples, but they were not alone. In the run up to, and after, partition, Hyderabad attracted three quarters of a million Muslim migrants.[4] Immediately after partition, refugees also started pouring into Bhopal, an Afghan successor state established in the early eighteenth century[5]. Nawab Hamidullah of Bhopal, recently Chancellor of the Chamber of Princes,[6] had a 'position and prestige', in V. P. Menon's jaundiced view, 'out of all proportion to the size and revenue of his State' [7]. Bhopal was one of the last princely states to accede to India - the other laggards being Travancore, Hyderabad, Dholpur and Indore (not all of whom had Muslim rulers).[8] Bhopal city was about 500 miles due south of Delhi; and from late August 1947, thousands of Indian Muslims from the Central Provinces, the United Provinces, Gwalior and East Punjab made a beeline for it. Notably, these people chose to head *south* to Bhopal, rather than migrate *west* across the border into West Pakistan, which for many of these migrants was just as close as Bhopal, if not closer. By mid October, 160,000 refugees had gathered in Bhopal[9] (see Table 1), and more would continue to flow in.

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[4] 'Note on the Refugee Problem of Hyderabad', NAI/MoS/F. 10(27)-H/49, 1949.

[5] Ramusack, *The Indian Princes and their States*, p. 28.

[6] V. P. Menon, *Integration of the Indian States*, Mumbai: Orient Longman, 1999 edn (1956), p. 97.

[7] Ibid, p. 347.

[8] Nicholas Mansergh (ed), *Transfer of Power*, Vol. 12, Doc. 302, 'Viceroy's Personal Report No. 15, L/PO/6/123:ff 208-22'

[9] H.H. Hamidullah of Bhopal to Vallabhbhai Patel, 6 October 1947. NAI/MoS/F.16-G(R)/47 Secret.

Table 1 somewehere here

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Refugees registered in Bhopal State up to 16 October 1947 [10]

Location	Origin	Numbers
In Bairagarh camp	From Central Provinces	32,225
	From United Provinces	6,896
	From other provinces	750
	From Gwalior	23,279
	From other States	9,000
	Total in Bairagargh	72,150
In Bhopal city	Unsorted	12,000
Unregistered arrivals since 16 October	-ditto-	4,000
Elsewhere in Bhopal, in Begumganj, Sehore, Budni and smaller thanas and tehsils	-ditto-	4,000
TOTAL IN BHOPAL STATE		**92,150**

The sources make it clear that if Bhopal could not absorb them, these refugees were ready to march further south to Hyderabad, but they had no intention of going back to their homes, now in a new republican entity called India. As C. C. Desai of the States Department admitted, about 100,000 'Muslim refugees were clustered at Bhopal station' in appalling conditions, because the Government of India had advised Bhopal's nawab not to let them in; significantly the 'refugees refuse[d] to get into [trains]' leaving Bhopal for destinations in India.[11] The Nizam of Hyderabad's government was sympathetic to the plight of these refugees, and put on special trains

[10] NAI/MoS/F.16-G(R)/47 Secret.

[11] File Note by C. C. Desai, 18 October 1947, NAI/MoS/F.16-G (R)/47 (Secret).

within the state's borders for them,[12] but this only made the Indian government more suspicious of Hyderabad's intentions and it did all it could to prevent the movement of Muslim refugees from India, as well as from other states such as Bhopal, into the Nizam's territories.[13] But its attempts to stem these flows were ineffectual. Between August 1947 and September 1948, i.e. between partition and the 'police action' that ended Hyderabad's brief show of independence, Indian Muslims continued to migrate to Hyderabad.[14]

Refugees were attracted not only to 'important' states with vocal leaders. Perplexingly, they rushed to the smallest of principalities and a multitude of 'little kingdoms'.[15] As the Nawab of Pataudi wrote in September 1947, 'refugees and wounded are pouring in as Pataudi town is the only place they feel safe.'[16] Malerkotla, a small state in the Punjab ruled by the Afghan Sherwani dynasty, which famously remained peaceful during partition,[17] was the destination for 40-60,000 refugees fleeing the massacres in surrounding East Punjab.[18] Mahmudabad, a minor Shia state near Lucknow, also drew hundreds of thousands of refugees, both Shia and Sunni, from the surrounding districts of the United Provinces.[19]

Nor was it the case that Muslim refugees only went to states with Muslim rulers (although this was the dominant pattern). By 10 October 1947, the tiny state of

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[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

[14] 'Note on the refugee problem in Hyderabad', NAI/MoS/F.10(27)/H-49. Also see Taylor C. Sherman, *Muslim Belonging in Secular India. Negotiating Citizenship in Postcolonial Hyderabad*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, p. 24.

[15] Bernard S. Cohn, 'Political Systems in Eighteenth Century India: the Benares Region', *JAOS*, 1962, pp. 313-314.

[16] H.H. Pataudi to Major General Rajkumar Rajindersinghji, 5 September 1947. NAI/MoS/F.2(13)-PR/47, Secret.

[17] Anna Bigelow, *Sharing the Sacred. Practicing Pluralism in Muslim North India*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

[18] NAI/MoS/F.2(19)PR-47.

[19] Personal interview with Suleiman Khan of Mahmudabad, Delhi, September 2014.

Dholpur, whose 'conservative' Hindu Maharaja had long been the bane of the States Ministry, had already received about 20,000 Muslims. The Maharaja then agreed to absorb even more Muslim evacuees from amongst the unfortunates gathered at Bhopal station, an action that led one intelligence officer to remark on his strange 'soft corner for these fellows'.[20] The Maharaja, for his part, defended his actions in the name of 'our precious national *RAJNITI* [politics] from our great cultures and outlook,' and 'King Dharma'.[21]

To summarise, then, refugees fled both India and Pakistan in huge numbers for princely destinations. Significantly, many Muslim migrants fled to these princely states, despite the fact that Pakistan was often as close, if not closer, at hand. This strongly suggests they deliberately chose these destinations, shunning the new republics.

The second stream was of refugees who abandoned their homes in *one princely state* to seek shelter *in another*. In this quest, they often passed through dominion territory, whether in India or Pakistan, but carried on by foot, cart, or train until they reached the princely state of their choice. One example was the flight of Muslims from Ajmer, Bharatpur and Alwar, (where communal violence, particularly against people of the Meo community, achieved horrific proportions[22]) to Tonk[23], a small state (founded in 1818 by Amir Khan, a prominent Pindari leader), due south of Jaipur. By mid-November 1947, 'some 20,000' Muslims had arrived in Tonk[24], chiefly from Alwar and Bharatpur. Another was the 'unaccountable exodus of Muslims, in large numbers, particularly of weavers and other artisans', from the Holkar state of Indore

[20] MAI/MoS/2(42)-PR/47, 1947.

[21] MAI/MoS/2(42)-PR/47, 1947.

[22] Ian Copland**, '**The Further Shores of Partition: Ethnic Cleansing in Rajasthan', *Past & Present*, No. 160, (Aug., 1998); Shail Mayaram, *Resisting Regimes: Myth, Memory and the Shaping of a Muslim Identity*, Delhi: Oxford University Press India, 1997.

[23] NAI/MoS/F.2(23)-PR/1947

[24] 'Tonk affairs', D.O. No. 296-P, NAI/MoS/F.2(23)-P.R.

to Hyderabad.[25] A third, as we saw in the case of Bhopal, was the flight of some 25,000 refugees from Gwalior, the Maratha state south of Agra and the Chambal river,[26] to Bhopal state.[27] All these refugees were Muslims who had previously lived peaceably as subjects of a Hindu ruler, but who now sought the protection of a Muslim nawab or nizam (albeit in states which had Hindu majorities). Once again, they chose to go to these states, rather than to Pakistan, although their homes were relatively close to Pakistan's borders.

A third form of 'migration to subjecthood' involved crossing the Radcliffe Line between India and Pakistan. But here some refugees, instead of seeking the protection of the other dominion, specifically sought to reach neighbouring principalities instead. One major stream of this kind was of mainly Sindhi Hindu refugees from the Khanate of Kalat in Balochistan to the Rajputana states in India. Another was the emigration of refugees into Bahawalpur, a largely barren desert state on the left bank of the Indus in Pakistan[28], mainly from East Punjab and Rajputana. We know a fair amount about this particular example because Penderel Moon, who took up an appointment in Bahawalpur just months before partition, left a detailed record in his celebrated memoir, *Divide and Quit*. The refugees were mainly from Ferozepur district in Indian (East) Punjab,[29] and also from Bikaner[30]. As Moon recorded, his 'heart sank at the vast numbers' of refugees, 'a column that stretched all the way from MacLeodganj Road to Bahawalnagar'. He recalls:

[25] Prime Minister, Indore, to C.C. Desai, 14 October 1947, NAI/MoS/F.16-G (R)/47 (Secret).

[26] Sir John Malcolm, *A Memoir of Central India including Malwa and Adjoining Provinces*, 2 volumes, (first published 1823); and Stewart Gordon, *The Marathas 1600-1818. The New Cambridge History of India, II.4*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1993.

[27] See Table 1 above.

[28] Ramusack, *The Princes of India*, p. 40; and Richard R. Bennett, 'The Greening of Bahawalpur', *Indo-British Review*, 15 (1988), pp.5-14.

[29] Penderel Moon, *Divide and Quit. An Eyewitness Account of the Partition of India*, New Delhi: Oxford India Paperbacks, 1998, p. 179.

[30] Ibid, p. 229.

> 'I was at a loss to understand why they had entered Bahawalpur instead of crossing the Sutlej into the (West) Punjab. They all said that Indian troops had scared them away from the road leading to the bridge over the river at Suleimanke and that they had therefore been compelled to turn aside into Bahawalpur.'[31]

But Moon's account is inconsistent. While suggesting that 'some of them with connections in the West Punjab still wanted to get there',[32] Moon admits that 'we could pick and choose among the refugees who actually entered our borders, passing onto the Punjab [only] those whom we did not like or were too numerous for us to absorb. But we could not control or even influence the movement of refugees from India and so determine which of them would enter Bahawalpur territory'. He also confesses to 'pushing' refugees 'of very poor stuff', those who were likely to be 'a drag on the economy', into West Punjab.[33] Clearly, Bahawalpur was an attractive destination for refugees, and most were reluctant to leave it.

Another flow of this kind, albeit moving in the opposite direction, (chiefly from Hyderabad Sind) headed to Jodhpur state, which, by the end of September 1947, had received upwards of 45,000 refugees.[34]All the bordering princely states clearly faced a refugee crisis: in late September, the Ministry of States wrote to the Prime Ministers not only of Jodhpur, but also Bikaner, Patiala, Jind, Malerkotla, Kapurthala, Faridkot and Nabha demanding information on refugee numbers in their states: 'such information [is] essential for planning movement programmes'.[35] Just as the officials of the Ministry in late 1947, so today's investigators cannot establish the numbers who had flowed into each state along the border, but the panicky communications suggest that they were not insignificant.

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[31] Ibid, p. 179.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid, p. 229.

[34] Report by A.S. Dhawan, 29 September 1947, NAI/MoS/ F.32-G(R)/47.(Secret)

[35] Ministry of States to Prime Ministers, 19 September 1947. NAI/MoS/ F.32-G(R)/47.(Secret)

The fourth stream were refugees who first sought help from a dominion government, whether India or Pakistan – and when that failed them, marched on to a princely state. One such example was the migration of Muslims from Badwani state in Central India to Dhulia in the Bombay Presidency. There 'the Congress Leaders' apparently 'encouraged' them to return home, which they obediently did. But when they faced further attacks 'at home', they decided to seek refuge in Hyderabad.

It is all but impossible to produce a reliable estimate of a total number for the people who joined one or other of these four streams. Few states kept records as precise as those of Bhopal, or if they did and they survive, these remain scattered across five hundred, mainly un-archived, private collections. These movements took place before the census of 1951, by which time most states had disappeared, having been integrated into larger provinces. But two sources hints at their consistency and scale. In his study of Sindhi culture, Thakur notes that while the largest numbers of the Sindhi refugees went to Bombay, the substantial remainder who did not concentrated in Jaipur, Ajmer, Jodhpur, Udaipur, Kotah, Bhilwarah, Tonk, Alwar and Bharatpur, and the 'old State[s] of Madhya Pradesh'.[36] (See Table 2) **Press: Table 2 somewhere here**. By October 1948, the trend was even clearer: more refugees were heading for princely territories. **(See Table 3: Press Table 3 somewhere here)**

Table 2

Distribution of Sindhi Refugees, 1948

Ajmer Merwara at Deoli	10,200
Bombay	2,16,500
Baroda	10,700
Bikaner State	8,900
Jaipur State	33,200
Jodhpur State	11,800
Madhya Bharat	3,400
Former Rajasthan	15,800
Saurashtra Union	45,500
Vindhya Pradesh	15,400
Madhya Pradesh	81,400
TOTAL	4,52,800

[36] U. T. Thakur, *Sindhi Culture*, Delhi: Sindhi Academy 1959, p. 32.

Source: U.T. Thakur, *Sindhi Culture*, p. 31.

Table 3

Distribution of Sindhi Refugees, October 1948

Ajmer Merwara	92,799
Bombay	2,64,023
Baroda State	21,138
C.P. and Berar	91,507
Jaipur State	51,795
Jodhpur State	45,060
Madhya Bharat Union	59,333
Rajasthan Union	32,544
Matsya Union	53,034
Saurashtra Union	35,891
Vindhya Pradesh	12,945

Source: U.T. Thakur, *Sindhi Culture*, p. 103.

Even more revealing is the Government of India's White Paper on States, published in 1950. This suggests that these trends had been so widespread, and so marked, that the distribution of India's minorities changed dramatically between 1947 and 1950 with *a marked clustering of minorities in princely territories*. By 1950, in under three years since partition, the proportion of India's Muslim population concentrated in princely territories had risen from 16% to 26%; of Christians from 46% to 50% and of Sikhs from 27% to 36%.[37] These patterns of clustering demand an explanation.

The migrations make one fact abundantly clear. At the end of empire, the people of the subcontinent were aware of the multiple sovereignties around them which co-

[37] *White Paper on Indian Sates (1950)*, Government of India Ministry of States, New Delhi, Manager of Publications, 1950, p. 18.

existed in uneasy juxtaposition. When they migrated, they believed they had real options between meaningful polities of very different kinds. For many, startling though it may seem to us today, *neither* 'India' *nor* 'Pakistan' was their first choice of destination.

Part II

Why was this? I now suggest some tentative answers to this question.

A part of the answer must surely be the fact that these states – large and small – appeared to offer a measure of constancy in a terrifying world of change. In no small measure, this was a consequence of British policies of indirect rule: the British had propped up subsidiary allies after 1818, and after the Rebellion of 1857, ensured that no state, however small, was allowed to fail. Hence many ruling dynasties which might otherwise have collapsed or been absorbed into other polities, survived, and their very longevity seems to have fostered the popular belief in 1947 that even the tiniest of little kingdoms would somehow endure, even as large parts of British India dissolved in chaos. However 'hollow' were the crowns worn in miniature principalities such as the tiny Kathiawad states, or indeed Puddukottai in the south, the migrants seemed to think the heads which wore them would not tumble.

Indeed, these huge movements of people demand that we reexamine the metaphor of the 'hollow crown'.[38] In 1947, in a moment of profound danger and crisis, would-be subjects cherished significant expectations of these polities and their rulers, expressed in petitions like this one from Abdul Wahid Khana, the former post-master of Okara to 'Her Highness, Rani Sahiba, Kalsia state':

[38] Nicholas Dirks, *The Hollow Crown. Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

> 'Owing to this loss of lives and property, we the remaining four members … of my family are quite destitute and helpless, and in the name of justice we demand from your kind highness that full justice may please be meted out by taking the culprits to task and granting us compensation of the full loss. Hoping full justice and early reply'.[39]

Above all, the migrants expected *protection* and *justice*. (Note that the postmaster used the word 'justice' three times in the two sentence cited above).

To explain this dynamic, I draw on Sanjay Subrahmanyam's and Muzaffar Alam's account of the successor states the 18th century. Subrahmanyam and Alam argue that these polities used a regional idiom consistently and successfully. They show that these polities 'dug deep into the mythic resources of regions'. But they also argue that 'the regional identities that were formed…were … the product of a complex interaction between region and empire'.[40] They referred, of course, to the *Mughal* empire. But I suggest that these regional, often quasi-ethnic identities (and their mythic resources and idioms) continued to evolve in the 19th and 20th centuries, in no less complex interactions with the *British* empire.

I also borrow Timothy Mitchell's concept of the 'state effect'.[41] Mitchell argues that the state exists not only in a material sense, as a set of institutions, but also as an idea. Put simply, people 'imagine' the state in ways that are often rather more coherent than the state as it is materially practised. This 'coherence' in the popular imagination of what the state was –- 'the state effect' – I suggest, was at play in princely states too, even if it was the product of different processes. Thomas Blom Hansen has developed Mitchell's concept further by distinguishing between the 'sublime' and 'profane' dimensions of the 'state effect', showing how, when 'a public order upset by riots' in Bombay exposed the state's everyday corruption and its 'profane' qualities, the

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[39] Abdul Wahid Khan to Rani Sahiba, Kalsia State, 25 October 1947, NAI?MoS/PR Branch, 2(51)-PR/47.

[40] Muzaffar Alalm and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, (ed.) *The Mughal State, 1526-1750*, New Delhi: Oxford India Publications, 1998, 'Introduction', p. 68.

[41] Timothy Mitchell, 'The Limits of the State. Beyond Statist Approaches and their Critics', *American Political Science Review*, Volume 85, No. 1, March 1991.

Srikrishna Commission, which drew upon 'the rhetoric of the state as a moral entity',[42] restored some sense of its existence as a sublime, ethical, whole. For reasons that have partly to do with the sublime 'state effect' nurtured quite deliberately in these kingdoms, I suggest, would-be subjects *believed* that nawabs, rajas and ranis could and would protect them *more effectively than the Indian army*, in whom as Pataudi wrote, they had lost 'all confidence'[43], despite the fact that most princely states had *no armies* whatsoever[44].

Migrants to the states thus had powerful expectations of justice – *ad'l* – a central tenet of kingship, which, as Richard Eaton has argued, had taken powerful roots throughout the subcontinent by the eighteenth century.[45] They voiced these expectations forcefully in innumerable petitions which asked for relief, compensation, even full-scale rehabilitation.

Were these hopes fuelled by their awareness of contemporaneous practices of 'modern' kingship? It seems very likely. Recent scholarship suggests that, despite British attempts to bend the principalities to their purposes, and to rule them firmly (if indirectly), rajas and nawabs found ways of resisting British intrusion in many areas of courtly life, religious affairs and secular patronage, adapting or 'inventing' new institutions, traditions and 'duties of kingship' - *rajadharma* - by which they entrenched a sort of 'monarchical modernity' or established new forms of 'minor sovereignty'[46] over their subjects. Indeed, many of them sought to project their influence beyond the boundaries of their kingdoms. As the Indian government admitted in its White Paper of 1950, 'In almost all the States, owing to the smallness

[42] Thomas Blom Hansen, 'Governance and Myths of State in Mumbai', in C. J. Fuller and Veronique Benei (ed), *The Everyday State in Modern India*, London: Hurst, 2001, pp. 51-52.

[43] Nawab of Pataudi to Major General Rajkumar Rajindersinghji, 5 September 1947, NAI/MoS/F.2(13)-P.R./47

[44] *Chamber of Princes Questionnaire 1928*, passim.

[45] Richard Eaton, 'Theorizing historical space in pre-colonial India: sovereignty, religion, literary networks', Birkbeck Lecture presented at Trinity College, Cambridge, October 2015.

[46] Eric Lewis Beverley, *Hyderabad, British India and the Word. Muslim Networks and Minor Sovereignty, c. 1850-1950*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

of the size and the compact nature of the territory, the existence of autocratic government had made for *easy co-ordination and quick solution* of such problems as attracted the Ruler's attention and interest.'[47] This swift dispensation of justice by the Durbar compared favourably with the lumbering, opaque and expensive courts of British Indiawhere justice was if not denied, endlessly delayed. While most states did not have laws recorded in codes accessible to the people, (often simply borrowing the laws of British India *mutatis mutandis* and applying them where needed), they administered justice decisively and above all swiftly. If in most cases, 'the decree of the Ruler was law, in a number of cases the Ruler not only constituted the source of justice but also personally administered it in actual practice'.[48] The postmaster of Okara's appeal to the Ranisaheba for justice is intelligible when viewed through this lens.

Another crucial development was the hugely expanded worship of tutelary deities in princely states over more than a century, and the patronage of religious festivals, notably Dasara and Muharram, in the performance of which the kings and courts played a central part, and which, as Pamela Price has noted, enabled these kingdoms to be perceived as a '*divinely protected area[s]'*.[49] The 'proper', and increasingly public, performance of these festivals by the nawab, raosaheb or ranisaheba was intended to reassure subjects that the kingdom would be protected by the divine grace of god or the regional tutelary deity. In Mysore, for instance, Dasara – during which the tutelary deity Chamundeshwari slays the demon Mahisasura - grew increasingly elaborate as the 19th century drew to a close. As the Resident observed in 1889, 'The Maharaja sits as a God to be worshipped by the people…he assumes a scared character, and if not God himself, is held to represent for a time a kingly divinity…In this capacity he ... presents himself to the homage, if not the adoration, of the

[47] *White Paper (1950),* p. 102. Emphasis added.

[48] Ibid, p. 116.

[49] Pamela Price, *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 138.

people'.[50] The numbers who came to Mysore city to view this spectacle and take part in the Dasara festival rose sharply in the early twentieth century. By 1941, the festival is said to had drawn 150,000 visitors to a town whose regular population had been recorded, in 1931, as only 107,000 people.[51]

Press: Image 2 somewhere here Dasara festival

In addition, princes patronised artists and artisans; maintained mosques, madrassas and endowed temples, and not merely within their own kingdoms. 'Princely' prestation supported the bathing ghats at Benaras, the Golden Temple at Amritsar and the holy places in Mecca and Medina.[52] Other beneficiaries of what Pamela Price has called 'dharmic largesse'[53] included the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, Aligarh College, Benares Hindu University, the Deccan Educational Society, and Khalsa College, just to name a few well-known 'national' institutions. By the mid-1920s, several princes had become adept at projecting their influence and reputation well beyond the boundaries of their states.[54]

The notion that kings were *personally* courageous was another message routinely disseminated by princes while making their presence felt within their states – usually done by 'touring' in conjunction with hunting excursions or *shikar* – which offered opportunities to display royal skills[55], and conspicuous devotion to their subjects. In one of several such stories that litter accounts of shikar, Mordaunt Pemberton describes going, in January 1933, on a hunt with 'H.H.' of Jhalawar, a tiny principality not far from Indore,

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[50] 'Note on Dusserah Durbar at Mysore 1889' by Resident Oliver St John, cited in Aya Ikegame, *Princely India Re-Imagined. A Historical Anthropology of Mysore from 1799 to the Present*, Routledge: Abingdon, 2013, p. 153.

[51] Aya Ikegame, *Princely India Re-Imagined. A Historical Anthropology of Mysore from 1799 to the Present*, Routledge: Abingdon, 2013, p. 158.

[52] Ramusack, *The Princes of India*, p. 141.

[53] Price, *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India*, *passim*.

[54] Ramusack, *The Princes of India*, p. 141.

[55] Ramusack, *The Princes of India*, p. 134.

> 'Soon after breakfast a shikar officer arrived from the jungle, where he had been tracking the pugmarks of the big panther, with a badly bitten arm. The animal had attacked him from behind… We went to the [nearest] dispensary *where H.H. personally began to tend to him*…'[56].

Shikar is usually seen through the prism of craven collaboration with 'hunting-shooting' white residents, but, as Julie Hughes shows, these were also occasions which allowed monarchs to display ethical attitudes to the land and the environment, and indeed towards their subjects[57]. Here again, if we read between the lines, we can see how princes adapted older traditions, norms and symbolism of shikar to the new setting of empire and evolving conceptions of monarchical modernity.

Press: IMAGE 3 somewhere here(Princes setting off for shikar)

The role of the 'colonial-modern' king as benevolent patron of the poor, the needy, and the distressed is another pertinent aspect of this reconstitution of modern kingship. By the time of his death in 1868, Krishnaraja Wodeyar III of Mysore had racked up huge debts. When these were investigated, it turned out that the 'bad habit', which had put him into the clutches of the money-lenders, was distributing rice to the poor, his largest single creditor being a grain supplier in Mysore city, one Naga Shetty. [58] Kingly 'beneficence', as Dirks has shown, had been central to the conceptions of sovereignty of the Vijaynagara kings, and their duties were to protect *dharma*, preside over a prosperous realm, 'where the people, "unafflicted by calamities, were continually enjoying festivals"'. [59] Modern monarchs, it seems, adapted these notions of beneficence to late-colonial circumstances. Relief in times of ecological crisis and famine was a central arena of princely activity, and as famine grew more frequent and more deadly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries,

[56] M. Pemberton Papers, Box 1, dairy entry, Tuesday 17 January 1933. Centre of South Asian Studies, Cambridge.

[57] Julie E. Hughes, 'Royal Tigers and Ruling princes: Wilderness and Wildlife Management in the Indian Princely States,' *Modern Asian Studies*, Volume 49, Part 4, July 2015.

[58] Ikegame, *Princely India Re-Imagined*, p. 24.

[59] Dirks, *The Hollow Crown*, p. 37.

princes engaged more and more prominently in famine relief in ways that differed markedly from those of their British neighbours and overlords. Among the largest monuments to the princes' engagement with famine relief is, of course, the Awadh Nawab's Great Imambara complex in Lucknow, completed as early as 1791, believed to have cost a million rupees.[60] Another is (the arguably less beautiful Beaux-Art or 'Indo-Deco' style) Umaid Bhavan palace in Jodhpur, built between 1929-1944 to provide work to the famished poor. Indore's royal family created the Gangajali Fund 'for use in grave emergency such as famine'.[61] Hyderabad's famine relief works are particularly well known, signalling as they did the distinctive political ethics of a patrimonial state in stark contrast to its British colonial counterpart. As Bhangya Bhukya[62] and Eric Beverley tell us, an important preoccupation of the Nizam's government was giving relief to the Indian victims of the late 19th century's 'Victorian holocausts'. In British India, famine relief was given on the cheap in return for hard labour. Asaf Jah Hyderabad instead wrote off land revenue demands and other taxes and debts. Recognising that by definition, victims weakened by famine were unable to work on heavy jobs such as road building, the Nizam's government offered paid work for lighter tasks such as the repair of tanks and irrigation channels. As well as the free provision of victuals to those unable to work, the state of Hyderabad provided food to those who were unable to migrate to relief sites, and even offered land for grazing and cultivation to new migrants.[63] Indeed, so extensive and successful were the Asaf Jah's state's famine relief policies that people began to migrate to Hyderabad in the late 19th century to take advantage of them.[64] And crucially, the Nizam's relief policy - about which his government was never slow to boast - was that it was given on exactly the same terms to immigrants from British India as to his own subjects. Hyderabad's officials took great pains, moreover,

[60] J. R. I. Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism in Iran and Iraq. Religion and State in Awadh, 1722-1859*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988, p. 95.

[61] *White Paper on Indian Sates (1950)*, Government of India Ministry of States, New Delhi, Manager of Publications, 1950, p. 66.

[62] Bhangya Bhukya, 'Between Tradition and Modernity: Nizams, Colonialism and Modernity in Hyderabad State', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XLVIII No. 48, November 2013.

[63] Beverley, *Hyderabad*, p. 175.

[64] Beverley, *Hyderabad*, p. 172-175.

to ensure that these charitable deeds received the widest publicity within the state as well as beyond. In volumes of photographs published between 1885 and 1902, the Nizam commissioned the famous photographer Lala Deen Dayal to document his 'Good Works'. This context helps explain why refugees might have expected both protection and succour in princely states in 1947.

There is a further point to consider. As Berenice Guyot Rechard has recently shown, 'borderlanders' living in the vicinity of rival sovereignties after decolonisation 'were comparing what each one brought them, in both positive and negative terms'.[65] Her work speaks of the anxiety-fuelled encounter between independent India and the People's Republic of China along their eastern Himalayan border, and the migration of people between these two competing states; but her analysis has a relevance to the situation in the entire subcontinent in 1947, where huge *internal* border zones connected princely states and republican dominions, and their subjects. When, as Ishan Mukherjee recently noted, both the sacred and profane dimensions of 'state effect' in 'India' collapsed in 1947 in the face of riots, mass migration, looting and disorder,[66] it is not impossible to understand why so many inhabitants of these internal borderlands chose the protection of princely states that seemed - at that moment - both more stable, more 'sublime', and more likely to offer protection and justice than two dominions which had yet to prove their capacity to govern.

Many kings and queens seized on the opportunity and responded energetically to these expectations, albeit in the idioms of 'modern' monarchical patronage. Hyderabad sheltered and fed huge numbers of those who migrated to the state, spending Rs 1 crore 25 lakhs on 'maintaining camps, providing houses, and settling them on lands'[67]. A full year after partition, at the time of India's 'police action',

[65] Berenice Guyot-Rechard, *Shadow States. India, China and the Himalayas, 1910-1962*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017, p.25.

[66] Ishan Mukherjee, 'Agitations, Riots and the Transitional State in Calcutta, 1945-50', unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Cambridge, 2017.

[67] 'Note on the Refugee Problem of Hyderabad', NAI/MoS/10(27)/H-49, 1949.

Hyderabad's relief camps were still looking after refugees, long after India had shut down most of its own camps. Hamidullah of Bhopal also refused to turn the refugees away,[68] despite intense pressure from the Government of India so to do, and long after the State's ability to absorb and feed these extra mouths had been overwhelmed by the size of the refugee influx. The Nawab, interestingly, also refused to put his tiny military force at India's disposal 'to compel these refugees to get into the trains' headed back to India. He gave Patel his reasons, in words that are deeply revealing:

> [it is] extremely difficult.. [for a Ruler] to exturn [*sic*] people who have entered its territories in great distress and in a condition of physical exhaustion, and who are seeking refuge and protection in parts of the country where they feel they might receive sympathy and kindness.

Bhopal also stressed how badly *his own subjects* would react if he acted otherwise: 'Any force used against such persons is likely to excite the local populations who might with justification blame their Government for ruthless and non-humanitarian policies'.[69]

Concerns about how refugee flows - both inwards and outwards - would affect their kingdoms also preoccupied the rulers of princely states. The Nawab of Bahawalpur was desperately upset that his 'loyal Hindu subjects' had been 'encouraged' (by Penderel Moon) to emigrate to India while he was away on in Europe his annual tour, and looked askance at many of the Muslim refugees who had arrived in their stead.[70] Significantly, the Nawab expressed the wish that *only refugees from Indian princely states* should be received and settled in Bahawalpur, since these people, 'being accustomed to personal rule, would more readily accommodate themselves to (local) conditions) and develop a loyalty to the Ruler.' [71] He was not alone in attempting to bolster, and indeed refashion, a princely order deemed suitable for postcolonial times

[68] H.H. Hamidullah of Bhopal to Vallabhbhai Patel, 24 September 1947. NAI/MoS/F.16-G(R)/47 Secret.

[69] H.H. Hamidullah of Bhopal to Vallabhbhai Patel, 24 September 1947. NAI/MoS/F.16-G(R)/47 Secret.

[70] Moon, *Divide and Quit*, p. 228.

[71] Ibid, p. 229.

by recruiting, after the British departure, loyal new subjects of the 'right type'. Dholpur, (a Hindu Maharaja) for his part sought to strengthen his position by absorbing those Muslim refugees who could not be accommodated in Bhopal, thereby bolstering his reputation as a *dharmic* ruler who cared for *all* his subjects, Hindu and Muslim alike, and tended the needy.[72] Hyderabad also sought to attract Muslim artisans, notably weavers. The Rajputana, Punjab and Western Indian states were particularly keen to invite Hindu refugee merchants from Sindh to make their states their chosen destination. Gwalior offered to accept four or five hundred refugee families, but only on the condition that they were 'well-to-do'.[73] And perhaps most bold of all these princely manoeuvres was that of Bharatpur, who –having driven out Meo Muslims in large numbers - began to invite members of the Jat community from Rohtak and surrounding areas to settle in Bharatpur, offering them key positions in the state. 'The Bharatpur government', a States department official alleged, was 'dreaming of a Jatistan'.[74]

Part III

By now the reader might well ask: what does this have to do with Gandhi, a tragic, Lear-like figure in the last days of his life?

[72] Central Intelligence Officer's Report, 27 October 1947, NAI/MoS/2 (42)-PR/47

[73] Uttara Shahani, personal communication. I am deeply grateful to Uttara for her practical help with this project, for being a critical interlocutor and a guide to elusive sources.

[74] Superintendent, Eastern Rajputana States Agency to Ministry of States, 2 December, 1947, NAI/MoS/2 (30)-P.R./47.

A certain amount, as it turns out. The sources on this period reveal fascinating hints that for Gandhi, the princely states had a key role to play after independence, both in the protection of minorities and the rehabilitation of refugees.

Two particularly poignant stories, which relate to the last weeks of the Mahatma's life, will make the point. The first has to do with Hindus who remained in Bahawalpur state after partition, but where in late November and December, fierce attacks on Hindu villages drove thousands out of the state into India. By December, 1947, a call for the mass evacuation of all Hindus from Bahawalpur to India was becoming louder, and Penderel Moon argued that this would be for the best, since the state's tiny (and, according to Moon, unruly) army and police force could not guarantee their safety. But Gandhi intervened, urging Bahawalpur's Hindus to stay put. He had spoken with the Nawab, Gandhi told them, and he had received 'the word of the Ruler that…the remaining Hindus could live in peace and safety, and [that] no one would interfere with their religion'.[75] When pressure for evacuation continued to mount, Gandhi agreed to send a personal emissary to Bahawalpur. So, in the third week of January 1948, Sushila Nayyar arrived in the state bearing a message from the Mahatma to the state's Hindus, urging them to stay on and to rely on the Nawab's reassurances. After touring the state herself, Nayyar concluded that Gandhi's position was delusional: too much blood had been spilled, too many Hindus had left, and too Hindu many homes had already been occupied by incoming refugees, or locals, for the Mahatma's message to have any chance of succeeding. By the time she returned to Delhi a week later, however, the Mahatma was dead. Until his last, then, Gandhi continued to have faith *not only the capacity but the will* of a Muslim ruler of a princely state in Pakistan to protect his Hindu subjects.

The second vignette speaks volumes about Gandhi's concern, by late September 1947, about the rehabilitation of Sindhis. To begin with, his particular preoccupation was the condition of 'Harijans' (or Dalits) who had remained behind in Sindh in Pakistan, and whom the government of Sindh was reluctant to give permission to leave. Gandhi believed that they were in great distress, and wrote letters urging the

[75] Moon, *Divide and Quit*, p.243.

owners of Sindhi shipping firms to evacuate them to ports in Kathiawad.[76] This broadened into a wider engagement, on Gandhi's part, with the question of where Sindhi refugees should be settled. The Mahatma concluded that his home region of princely Kathiawad would be the best place of refuge for them. To achieve this, he set about persuading the Maharao of Kutch to donate land for the creation of a large Sindhi Hindu settlement. Within no time, he succeeded. The Maharao agreed to donate 15,000 acres of land abutting the (then small) port at Kandla. The grant was gazetted on 29 January 1948. On the morning of 30 January, just hours before he was assassinated, Gandhi received a telegram from the Dewan of Kutch informing him of the Maharao's grant.[77] The township established on the site is named Gandhidham in his memory.

(Press Image 3 Gandhidham Samadhi somewhere here).

(Image 4. Detail of Gandhidham Samadhi somewhere here)[i]

Here again we see evidence of Gandhi's belief that princes, whether as patrons of refugees or as protectors of minorities, had a part to play in the post-colonial future of South Asia.

In this matter, as in other matters of the moment, Gandhi was sharply at odds with his coadjutors in the Congress leadership, not least Nehru, whose view of the states was deeply unsympathetic, and who was clear that the rehabilitation of refugees was the job not of the princes, but of the government of India's new republic. Let me underline that these interventions by the Mahatma came after Gandhi's much better known support of *satyagrahas* against many aspects of princely rule in the late 1930s and 40s. I am not suggesting, remotely, some false revision by which Gandhi is metamorphised into an uncritical admirer of India's princes. My hypothesis - and it is no more than that - is that the Mahatma had a different, and more nuanced,

[76] Gandhi to Shantikumar N. Morarjee, 25 September 1947, (from Gujarati, Vol. 89, p. 235). Motilal Jotwani (ed.), *Gandhiji on Sindh and the Sindhis*, Delhi: Sindhi Academy, ND) (Courtesy Uttara Shahani).

[77] *Gandhidham*, Bombay: The Sindhu Resettlement Corporation, 1952. (I thank Uttara Shahani for generously sharing this document with me.)

understanding of with what Janaki Nair describes as 'monarchical modernity', [78] and with princely experiments with a different 'truth'.

Gandhi himself was, of course, a princely subject born and bred. His knowledge of parts of princely India, or 'Indian India' as it was often described in the late 19th century, was foundational and intimate. He had been raised in Kathiawad – a region dotted with small states, in one of which his father was the Dewan (or chief minister) of the ruler. He spent most of his later life in western India, a vast internal borderland region in which princely states were more numerous and prominent than in any other part of India. These polities were thus in no sense exotic or unfamiliar to him. At the start of his political career in South Africa, Gandhi's work (as that of so many nationalists and social reformers) had been funded by leading Indian princes: Bikaner, Mysore, and Hyderabad.[79] In his first recorded thoughts on princes, he writes of being moved by their plight, dressed up like *khansamas* (or waiters) at Lord Curzon's *durbar*.[80] Seeing them attired 'like women', in silk *achkans*, pearl necklaces and bracelets, revealed to him the depth of their 'slavery' and emasculation.[81] Arguably, then, for Gandhi, the rajas and nawabs were *Indians*. He was influenced by their own self-image as being oppressed - albeit in very particular ways - by British power. This was a viewpoint that many began to articulate more openly after Lord Reading's viceroyalty, and it lay behind the princes' move to join the proposed Indian federation, which eventually failed, in 1935.

In 1925, addressing the Kathiawad Political Conference, Gandhi put forward his first serious and detailed thesis on kingship. In it, he argued that trusteeship was the ethical basis of kingship:

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[78] Janaki Nair, *Mysore Modern. Rethinking the Region under Princely Rule*, Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2011.

[79] Judith M. Brown, *Gandhi. Prisoner of Hope*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 54.

[80] M. K. Gandhi, *The Indian States' Problem*, Ahmedabad: Navajivan Trust, 1941. Also see M. K. Gandhi, *Autobiography*, Vol. I, Part III, Chapter 16, *passim*.

[81] M. K. Gandhi, *The Indian States' Problem*, p. 4.

> If the institution of kingship has a moral basis, Princes are not independent proprietors but only trustees of their subjects for revenue received from them. It can therefore be spent for them only as trust money… [as in] the English Constitution.

This resembled, of course, Gandhi's much better-known and much criticised thesis on the responsibilities of the ideal capitalist, and the correct relationship between captains of industry and their workers. As with the mill-owning capitalists, he urged restraint upon the princes, asking them to 'observe our ancient tradition that revenue is intended only for popular welfare', and to abolish the practice (ancient or otherwise), of extracting cesses from their subjects. '*My ideal of Indian states is Ram Rajya*', the Mahatma declared: a condition he believed the princes could achieve, and should be their goal.[82] In an interesting twist, Gandhi also referred to 'ideal caliphs' such as Abubakar and Hazrat Umar – who would 'know public opinion by intuition'.[83] Intriguingly, as late as 1936, Gandhi described Mysore under Wodeyar rule as 'Ramrajya'.[84]

I offer these preliminary thoughts on Gandhi, princes, and subjecthood to provoke discussion. Scholarship on a few individual states has, in the twenty-first century, begun to recognise how some princes had engaged, in distinctive ways, with modernity, and elaborated new practices and discourses of legitimacy within the framework of indirect rule. Perhaps the time has also come to reframe our understanding of Gandhi to take on board the influence of 'monarchical modernity' on his ethical politics. Perhaps 'Ramrajya' was more than just a metaphor for Gandhi. Certainly, until his last breath, he believed the well-run princely state to be viable, legitimate, and to have a post-colonial future. For him, the flight of refugees to these kingdoms after partition made perfect sense. For his colleagues in the Congress, by contrast, these movements were completely unintelligible. The governments of both India and Pakistan regarded these migrations as profoundly dangerous. In its Whiggish course, history was not on Gandhi's side; nor was it on the side of refugees in search of subjecthood.

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[82] *Young India*, 8 January 1925.

[83] Ibid.

[84] *The Hindu*, 1 January 1936. Also cited in Ikegame, *Princely India Re-imagined.*

Conclusion

These aspirations - whether princely, popular or Gandhian - failed. But 'success' is not, and should not be, the only subject of history (if that were our yardstick, there would be little material outside the chronicles of the victors for historians to study). These events represent a brief moment when alternative outcomes were imagined, and were deemed possible; and they challenge – and make briefly strange– the teleological histories of the nation with which we are so familiar. They call to mind Frederick Cooper's account of the end of empire in Africa,[85] a story rich and strange, with many possible endings, not all of them 'the nation state'. Just as the inhabitants of West Africa, so also the people of the subcontinent dreamt different dreams in 1947. For a great many more than we have previously realised, the survival and flourishing of princely sovereignty seemed a distinct, and meaningful, possibility.

In the period between 1947 and 1956, the princely states emerged as potentially powerful regional polities with distinct and embedded alternative claims to legitimacy. Some challenged and even threatened the very premises of the nation state; and this was not restricted to Hyderabad. 'Language movements' admittedly also began to articulate regional identities in other ways. But I suggest that the ideas of the linguistic region and of ethical kingship were not separate but were powerfully conjoined by late colonial monarchical practice and popular perception. This is why they came to be seen as such an immediate threat to India's survival as a nation state.

After partition, the mass migration of refugees to these princely states, and their emergence as a potential focus of alternative notions of sovereignty, legitimacy and belonging, helps to explain why national governments in India were uncompromisingly insistent on dismantling them so rapidly and so ruthlessly between 1948 and 1950. This account makes it easier to understand why the instruments of

[85] Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question. Theory, Knowledge, History*, University of California Press, 2005.

accession the princes signed (which in any event made few concessions to them) were rapidly torn up by the Government of India; why the states were swiftly bundled into larger provinces; and why the Indian constitution of 1950 is shot through with tense republicanism, in no mood to make concessions to India's monarchical past. Another conundrum- the sudden ubiquity of language movements and regionalisms, arising apparently out of nowhere in 1947- also begins to make sense when viewed from this perspective; and it offers us another entry-point into the story of States Reorganisation in 1956.

There are many possible ways, then, in which the actions of these frightened refugees who fled to states ruled by princes and ranis who received them with regal beneficence, might help us to rethink the early history of the new nation. The Mahatma's last-minute interventions in these affairs shed new and unfamiliar light on Gandhi's vision of its future.

[i] The translation of the commemorative text reads, 'Bapu, by whose blessing it was swiftly resolved to construct a new township for the denizens of Sindh. On 12 February 1949, Bapu's ashes/blessings were immersed in Kandla, and so it was resolved to call the new township Gandhidham…'.